9-1955

Farm and home - Give your seams the professional touch.

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Recommended Citation
Cleeve, Brenda (1955) "Farm and home - Give your seams the professional touch.," Journal of the Department of Agriculture, Western Australia, Series 3: Vol. 4 : No. 5 , Article 17.
Available at: https://researchlibrary.agric.wa.gov.au/journal_agriculture3/vol4/iss5/17

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BADLY-MADE seams label a garment "home-made" more readily than any other feature. The making of seams must be of primary consideration during the construction of a garment—from the cutting out process to the final pressing. The finished result will be well worth any extra time and care taken in the making.

Good seams start with good cutting. Place your pattern carefully, and use sufficient pins to hold it securely. Keep the material as flat as possible on the table while cutting. Cut with the blunt end of the scissors on top so that the narrower pointed blade slides along under the material. For a smooth line avoid cutting to the end of the blades each time. Instead, when nearing the end of the blades, slide the scissors along for the next cut.

After cutting, pin the seams ready for tacking. Unless you are a very experienced needlewoman it is wiser to tack all seams for a more satisfactory finish. To pin material into position for seaming it should be left flat on the table, especially with long seams as on skirts. This will give a smoother line as the material is not likely to be stretched, as often occurs when it is placed over the fingers. Pins should always be placed at right angles to the seam line. This prevents a bumpy seam, makes tacking easier and the pins can be removed more readily when tacking or machining. (See Fig. 1.)

As with pinning, tacking should be done with the work flat on the table. Use a long needle to enable you to tack more quickly.

TACKING BOARD

A handy piece of dressmaking equipment is a piece of board approximately 12in. x 20in. Masonite or even thick cardboard could be used, or it can be made of
smooth plywood. It is ideal for use when tacking or pinning. The board is useful to place over a polished or painted table to prevent pin and needle pricks, and it gives a firm surface if held on your lap.

When tacking or machining, work from the top down or the centre outwards, i.e., from the waist to the hem or the neck to the armhole. This gives a better hang to the seams.

MACHINING

Before machining a fabric which has not been handled before, check the tension of your machine, using a scrap of the material doubled. It is useless to test the tension on a single layer of material as the only time this is used in dressmaking is when gathering. At any other time two or more pieces are being sewn together.

Thick materials need a larger needle, thicker thread and longer stitch than fine materials. Very fine materials such as nylon may require a looser tension.

To avoid the cottons becoming entangled, in the machine stitching, place both threads on the machine to the back with the top one under the presser foot. When the seam is complete, remove the tacking a few inches at a time to avoid splitting or tearing, especially on fine materials and rayons.

CHOOSING A SEAM

The seam to be used on a garment will depend on the style whether the seams are to be ornamental or purely constructional; whether they are curved or straight, whether the garment will have to withstand frequent washings. Of course the material being used is most important—whether it is thick, fine, transparent or frays easily.

Simple or Plain Seam.

The simple, plain or open seam is the most widely used of all. It is flat and inconspicuous, consisting of one row of machining on the wrong side. Probably its chief advantage is that it can be taken in or let out as required with a minimum of effort.

After machining, the edges of this seam are usually pressed open, except where the material is transparent when a less conspicuous seam can be made by pressing both turnings the same way.

Where the material is very firm and does not fray, or on coat seams which are to be covered by lining, the edges may be left raw. Otherwise the edges may be finished by more durable methods such as:

Notching or Pinking.

Here again this should only be done on very firm materials which are not to be washed frequently such as woollens and perhaps on evening dresses which have a limited life.

If pinking shears are not available the edge may be notched by hand. With a little practice on a scrap of material this can be mastered and done quite quickly. To notch an edge fold one side at right angles to the seam line. With a small pair of scissors cut diagonally across the fold about \(\frac{1}{4}\) in. from the edge to form a V-shaped cut when the edge is opened out again. The next fold should be about \(\frac{1}{4}\) in. from the first so that the V-cuts are continuous and resemble pinking. (See Fig. 2.)

Avoid making the cuts too deep as this weakens the seam.

Edge Stitching.

This is the firmest finish for raw edges on the plain seam and is the best one to use on materials which are to with-
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stand constant laundering. It is not suitable on curved edges or on very heavy materials as this results in a bulky seam. Turn under the raw edges once to the wrong side and machine stitch close to the folded edge. If stitched close to the raw edges after one or two washings the material will have frayed out again and the value of the firm finish lost. Remember when machining that the edges are merely machined on the inside for neatening and should not be sewn to the body of the garment. (See Fig. 3.)

**Overcasting.**

Overcasting is the finish most suitable for heavy weight fabrics, curved seams or those on the bias or cross grain as these are easily stretched. It is also useful on fine materials where pinking or edge stitching would be too conspicuous. Overcasting worked in a matching thread is the least visible finish. The edges may be overcast singly or together—singly with seam pressed open in a bulky fabric; together on fine materials or when used at waistlines or armholes. The stitches should be approximately \( \frac{1}{8} \) in. deep and \( \frac{1}{8} \) in. apart. When overcasting avoid pulling the cotton too tightly as this folds the edge over making unnecessary bulk and causing the seam to pucker.

**Binding.**

This is suitable on thick materials and on unlined garments such as coats and dressing gowns. A soft commercial bias binding or any soft material such as lining fabric, voile or net may be used. Be careful when attaching the binding not to stretch it and cause puckering on the seams.

**Welted Seam.**

A welted seam is a variation of a plain seam and is used as a trimming especially on winter garments or plain fabrics such as linens. (See Fig. 4.)

Machine the seam as for a plain seam but press both edges to the same side. If the material is bulky the underneath edge may be trimmed back so that it is \( \frac{1}{8} \) in. narrower than the top. This is usually necessary on thick fabrics to avoid a ridge showing on the right side.

**French Seam.**

Here is a firm seam but one only suitable for fine materials. It cannot be used on curved seams and having no allowance for letting out is not a good seam to use on fitted garments. To make this seam, place the wrong sides of the material together as the first row of machining is done on the right side. This should be...
done \( \frac{1}{4} \) in. outside the seam or fitting line. Trim the turnings back to \( \frac{1}{4} \) in. after machining. Now press the seam so that it is flat on the wrong side. Turn the seam to the wrong side and fold so that your first row of machining is right on the edge of the fold. Work another machined row on the seam line, i.e. \( \frac{1}{4} \) in. from the folded edge. This row must be so placed that all the raw edges are completely enclosed. French seam should be no wider than \( \frac{1}{4} \) in. If a "fringe" is visible on the right side the turnings have not been trimmed back far enough before working the second line of machining.

**Flat Seam.**

Like the French seam this is not suitable for use where any alterations may be necessary. It is a very firm seam and if worked properly is the flattest of all seams. For this reason it is particularly useful on underclothing, shirts, blouses, pyjamas and babies' clothing.

Where the garment is to be a fitted one such as a blouse, make a plain seam on the right side of the material, taking up all the seam allowance. Now trim one edge back to \( \frac{1}{4} \) in. from the machining row and the other back to \( \frac{1}{4} \) in.—this may be a little wider on a thicker material such as flannelette. Now press both turnings so that the wider one covers the narrower one. The seam must be quite flat on both sides with no pleat on the wrong side.

Turn the edge of the wider piece under and machine it down on the edge of the fold so that the narrow piece is completely concealed.

An easier method if making this seam can be used where the fit is not so important as with pyjamas. Turn down a single fold about \( \frac{1}{4} \) in. wide on to the wrong side of one edge. Slip the edge of the second piece right to the crease of this fold and tack firmly. Wrong sides should be together. Now machine \( \frac{1}{4} \) in. from the edge of the fold so that the two pieces of material being joined are caught firmly together. It is not important to catch the raw edge of the turning on the first piece—this is merely done to make the

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**Fig. 5.**

- A. Wrong side.
- B. Wrong side.
- C. Machining.
A flat seam may be worked with the machining rows on the right or wrong sides, although the seam is smoother on the skin if worked on the right side. Where the seam is worked on the wrong side the second machining row may be replaced by hemming for a softer, less visible finish.

**Lapped Seam.**

This is a seam with many uses—joining yokes, at waistlines as a decorative and for renovations.

For a narrow lapped seam—the usual one for yokes and joining waistlines, turn under the entire seam allowance as one piece. The flattest piece or in the case of a waist join the one with the least bulk in the form of darts and tucks should be the one turned down. Place the edge of this fold exactly on the seam line of the other section, easing or adjusting any fullness as necessary. Edge stitch this close to the fold. For a decorative and firmer finish a second row of machining may be worked a little above the first one. This is a good idea if gathering is to be held in place. Raw edges on the wrong side should be overcast.

A wide lapped seam is worked in the same way except that the first row of machining is worked ⅛ in. or more from the edge to give the appearance of a tuck and the second row is omitted.

Where a decorative finish is desired, lace, braid or bias strips can be placed under the turned edge before it is placed on to the second piece and sewn in with the first machining row. To outline seams with contrasting colours or fabrics a double lapped seam can be used. Turn down a fold on both pieces the width of the seam allowance. Place these edges over the material to be inserted leaving the desired amount of insertion showing. Machine along both edges.

Where the amount to be inserted is over ⅛ in. wide more turning will need to be taken if the garment is a fitted one as the insertions will alter the size of the pattern.

A double lapped seam can be an effective way of adding extra width or length into a garment, especially on children's clothing. Cut the garment where the extra allowance is to be made and turn a single fold on each side of the cut. Place each edge over the material to be inserted and machine as before. Braid or binding can be inserted under the fold before machining to give a more decorative finish. A pretty result can be obtained by inserting a gathered piece between the two edges i.e. a ruched band let in.

This method of renovating is often a more satisfactory way of adding length than letting down a hem, especially where the material has faded.

These seams are the most common ones used and a knowledge of their use and construction can help the amateur dressmaker to produce a better finished article. It is well worth while spending a few minutes in practising the seam until you are proficient and any time spent in tacking is never wasted. Always consider your material first as this, more than any other factor governs the type of seam you will use.

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